

Longer road to offer an alternative to I-17

by **Ron Sanzone** - Jun. 30, 2008

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Frustrated drivers using Interstate 17 in the north Valley will not have to schedule trips around its unpredictable traffic for much longer.

By next year, drivers will be able to cruise from as far north as New River to areas south of Loop 101 without getting onto the freeway.

The Maricopa County Department of Transportation is preparing to open up bidding in August for the rights to build an interim, two-lane, 2 1/2-mile stretch of Gavilan Peak Parkway, connecting it to North Valley Parkway just east of I-17.

Currently, Gavilan Peak Parkway dead-ends about midway between the Pioneer Road and Carefree Highway intersections with I-17. North Valley Parkway dead-ends slightly north of Carefree Highway's intersection with I-17.

The county expects work on the road and an adjacent bike path to begin in October and wrap by March. The county would like to expand Gavilan Peak Parkway into a four- or five-lane parkway, but that is unlikely to occur for at least a decade, officials say.

Still, the two-lane extension is expected to ease congestion along I-17 and provide law-enforcement authorities a way of detouring traffic when they need to close the freeway after serious accidents.

Extending Gavilan Peak Parkway has long been rumored. The project, designed by MCDOT, balances the needs of Anthem and other nearby communities to access an alternative to I-17 with the desires of Desert Hills residents to keep direct traffic from Anthem out of their community.

The new section of Gavilan Peak will have two intersections, Pioneer Road and Cloud Road, neither of which runs through Desert Hills. The Pioneer Road intersection will also connect with I-17.

The county is picking up the project's estimated \$10.7 million tab, which includes \$3.3 million paid to the state for 14 acres for the road.